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Sea Swallow

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Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea* 65.6S 108.6E Petersen Ice Shelf, Antarctica, 19 Mar 2007. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

OFFICERS OF THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRDWATCHING SOCIETY

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For details of Local Representatives and other useful addresses, see back page.

Aims and Activities: The primary aim of the Society is to promote a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and of landbirds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare-time recreation and hobby. The secondary aim is to co-ordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist ashore. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, usually in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.
Membership: has been widened from the RN to include those, regardless of nationality, who share a common background of the sea. Instruction for joining can be found on the Society Website and at the back of *Sea Swallow.*
Subscription rates: Full and associate members £12 annually. Due 1 January.
Library rates: Cost of *Sea Swallow*, (£10) plus postage.
RNBWS Record Forms - can be found on the Society Website at www.rnbws.org.uk. Completed forms should be sent to the Gen Sec or Editor of SS for onward transmission.
Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the Editor. Instructions to authors can be found towards the back.

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Upland Geese *(Chloephaga picta leucoptera)*, Nr Mare Harbour, Falkland Islands, 13 Nov 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

This has been a year of steady progress for the Society. After the disappointment of the cancelled trip to Diego Garcia in 2006 there is renewed vigour for the 2007 expedition which takes place in November with the support of OTEP and the RSPB, and this year we are pleased to include two colleagues from the Army Ornithological Society. We have also strengthened our ties with Chagos Conservation and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) to ensure a coordinated approach to our work. Looking further ahead, the Society is studying the possibility of an expedition to the Falkland Islands in 2008/2009, and we expect to continue to visit Gibraltar for the migration spectacle. These are ideal activities to draw in new members. Back to the present, this year we gave a Simpson Scholarship to assist our Dr Russ Wynn in his Seabird monitoring project in Cornwall, and this has been a great success. Although we are a small Society we are widely know, we have recently signed up Caio J Carlos as our Brazilian /South American rep. Our web database work is underway and I look forward to it being up and running in the spring, together with a few site refinements. All this together with regular UK field trips makes for a full programme. Please spread the word to encourage those with an interest in birdwatching to join.

David Dobson

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

This is my first year as your Chairman and I have been impressed by the work achieved by the Society. The *Sea Swallow* and Bulletins continue to be informative and well read publications not only amongst our membership but in the Ornithological Community as a whole.

Our top priority is, of course, to make a real contribution to conservation and you will see good evidence of that in this edition. But to continue and expand such conservation effort in the future we must also build our membership and so I see attracting recruits as a crucial second priority. So I ask you all to look to your younger friends and colleagues, both service and civilian, to find those who would enjoy and contribute to the society.

Of note in this edition is the considerable work done by Steve Copsey and Mark Cutts in not only helping to develop the birding knowledge base for the Falklands Islands but also in developing the understanding and interest of the FI Service Community in this rich and diverse habitat. Elsewhere in the bulletin we are also pleased to have an article by Robin Woods, a long time member and world authority on the Flora and Fauna of the Islands. In this, the 25th Anniversary of the Falklands conflict, these articles are particularly relevant. As a result of this work we are pleased to welcome a number of new members including the Natural History film maker Nigel Marven.

As our links with the Falklands strengthen, our work with the British Indian Ocean Territories continues to be important. I am very pleased that, with the approval of PJHQ, our expedition to Diego Garcia this year is going ahead and as you read this, our Team, led by Pete Carr, will be deep into the Scaveola counting the Red Footed Boobies. This work links well with our continued involvement with the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) which works, in collaboration with several government departments, to conserve the Flora and Fauna of the 17 British Overseas Territories

On the home front we have continued with our field trip programme with a particularly successful trip in the spring to Rye harbour / Dungeness which saw over 100 species. I look forward to our continued success in 2008 and I hope to meet yet more of you on our field trips next year.

Martin Alabaster

EDITORIAL

As outlined in both the President's and Chairman's forewords, the Society continues to develop and, in tandem with this development, our reputation as a leading authority on seabirds continues to increase. In line with this knowledge, the Society has increasingly looked to study the wider ecology and diversity of oceanic islands and this edition of *Sea Swallow* reflects that burgeoning area.

I am delighted to include a number of articles about the Falklands in this 25th anniversary of the Falklands conflict. The article by Robin Woods is a major coup as he is recognised as one of the leading authorities on Falklands ecology. This article is nicely supported by those of Steve Copsey and Mark Cutts who spent time on the islands in the last 12 months and their observations have added significantly to the wider ornithological knowledge of the area.

As I write this editorial sitting at the desk in my new job working for the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, the Diego Garcia expedition is well underway; the Red-footed Booby survey is taking a lot of their time, but the team are also carrying out a repeat ornithological census to allow comparison with that undertaken in 2005. The expedition report will form the backbone of *Sea Swallow* 57.

There is still a need for both articles and seabird observations in order to maintain the publication's credibility and I urge all of you to work towards that as a 2008 resolution.

Speckled Teal *(Anas flavirostris)*, Berthas Beach, Falkland Islands, 27 Dec 2006.
Photo: Steve Copsey.

NOTES ON SEABIRD REPORTS RECEIVED 2005-2006

by Neil Cheshire

Contributions continued at a modest level this year. David Ballance continues to make voyages in merchant ships and again has sent in detailed daily records, this time from the North Atlantic. Thomas Johannsen sent notes of interesting observations from around the world. Unfortunately, I mislaid two of his reports last year which are now included in this summary. Stephen Chapman's records are from an enviable voyage to the West Indies aboard a sail training vessel and Pam Gooding reports from a cruise in Antarctic waters. All observers are thanked for their participation.

David K. Ballance	m.v. *Independent Venture*	Liverpool-Philadelphia-Richmond (Virginia)-Philadelphia-Antwerp-Liverpool, Aug-Sept 2006, 26R.
Stephen Chapman	s.v *Tenacious*	Las Palmas-Cape Verde –Dominica-Antigua,Nov-Dec 2006, 6R.
Pam Gooding	m.v. *Polar Star*	Ushuaia-Antarctic Peninsula-South Shetlands Is-South Orkney Is-South Georgia-Falkland Is-Ushuaia, Feb 2005, 3R + 2 summary sheets.
Capt.Thomas Johannsen MN	m.v. *Rosario*	Valencia-Abijan-Douala-Lome. Rio Grande(Brasil)-Galveston and return. Panama- Rio Grande. Mar-Jun 2004, 4C.
	m.v.*Hedwig Oldendorff*	Antwerp-Sepetiba(Brasil)-Kaohsiung via South Africa, Feb-Mar 2005, 5C.
	m.v. *Auguste Oldendorff*	Libya-Gibraltar-New Orleans-Tubarao(Brasil).
		Santos-Trinidad-Long Island USA, Mar-May 2006,9C.

	m.v. *Lily Oldendorff*	Stewart (Canada)- Alaska-Onahama(Japan). Pohang-Longview(USA),Feb-Apr 2007,6C
B.W.Rowlands	rms *St. Helena*	Cape Town-Tristan da Cunha-Gough Island-Cape Town, Jan -Feb 2006. 176 'ten minute' cards. (Not included in this report, summarised by observer in SS 55)

Observers are referred to by their initials. Dates refer to 2006 unless otherwise listed. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of degrees of latitude and longitude.
nm = nautical miles (1.852 km), Ad = Adult, h = hours, imm = immature.

ALBATROSSES ***Diomedeidae***

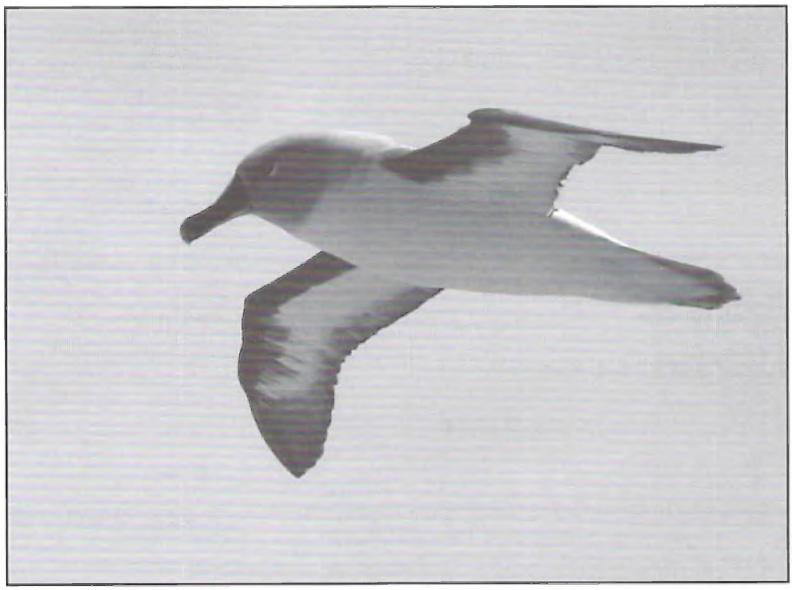
Wandering Albatross ***Diomedea exulans***. Recorded at 62.4S in Drake Passage on 10 Feb 05(PG).

Black-footed Albatross ***Diomedea nigripes***. During a North Pacific crossing from Alaska to Japan, TJ recorded one at 50.8N 171.1W on 11 Feb 07, one at 49.8N 174.9W on 12th, two at 50.0N 177.3E on the 14th, two at 49.7N 162.1E on 16th, one at 43.6N 149.4E on 18th and the last one at 39.3N 144.2E on 19th Feb 07. On his return from Korea to the US west coast he saw one at 28.1N 159.3E on 19 Mar 07, four at 28.5N 160.4E on 20th, four at 28.7N 166.4E on the 21st, one at 29.3N 172.5E on 22nd, one at 29.8N 178.7E on the 23rd, four at 30.0N 160.0W on 24th, two at 30.3N 163.7W on 25th, five at 30.3N 158.5W on 26th, four at 30.7N 153.9W on 27th, six at 30.9N 149.1W on the 28th, six at 33.7N 144.3W on 29th, six at 37.2N 139.0W on 30th and the last at 40.5N 133.8W on 31 Mar 07.

Laysan Albatross ***Diomedea immutabilis***. One was seen by TJ in the western North Pacific at 28.5N 160.4E on 20 Mar 07, then two at 30.3N 163.7W on 25th, two at 30.7N 154.0W on 27th, two at 30.9N 149.1W on 28th, three at 33.7N 146.3W on 29th, and six at 37.2N 139.0W on 30 Mar 07.

Black-browed Albatross ***Diomedea melanophris***. TJ provided several records from Brazilian waters, including five Ad. in the approaches to Rio Grande (32S) on 24 Apr 04, two at 31.2S 50.2W on 6 Aug 04, two at 28.4S 47.8W on 5 Aug 04, two at 23.5S 42.1W on 4 Aug 04 and near the northern limit of their range, 45 approaching Rio de Janeiro (22.9S) on 2 May 04 and two nearby off Cape Frio (22.8S) on 11 June 04. He recorded the species in the South Atlantic with two at 32.6S 10.8E on 20 Mar 05, five at 34.5S 18.4E the next day and two at 35.3S 26.4E off South Africa on 22 Mar 05. A record from 67.1S, Marguerite Bay, Antarctic Peninsula on 11 Feb 05(PG).

Grey-headed Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma*. Recorded by PG at 67.1S, Marguerite Bay, Antarctic Peninsula on 11 Feb 05.



Grey-headed Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma*, 49.4S 56.0E, 10 February 2006. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

FULMARS *Fulmarinae*

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*. Seen by PG at 67.8S off Adelaide Island, Antarctic Peninsula on 13 Feb 05.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. DKB had the usual records in the North Atlantic during August. Maximum counts included 99 in 3 h at 54N 25.3W on 14th, 246 including a dark phase bird in 1.5h at 52.6N 34.2W and 254 in 3.4h at 52.0N 36.2W on 15th, 53 at 49.1N 45.8W E of Newfoundland on 16th and the last one at 46.6N 52.3W on 17th. Eastbound on a more southerly course he saw fewer Fulmars and had a maximum count of 487 in 2h mostly around fishing vessels at 50.0N 3.5W off Lyme Bay on 7th Sept. In North Pacific waters TJ recorded 11 at 57.7N 134.8W on 5 Feb 07 and 17 at 51.5N 163W on 10 Feb 07.

Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialoides*. Seen at 67.8S off Adelaide Island, Antarctic Peninsula on 13 Feb 05(PG) .

Cape Petrel *Daption capense*. TJ recorded one off southern Brazil at 31.2S 50.2W on 6 Sep

04, 60+ at 34.5S 18.4E off South Africa on 21 Mar 05. PG recorded them at 67.1S approaching Marguerite Bay, Antarctic Peninsula on 11 Feb 05.

Fea's Petrel ***Pterodroma feae***. SC recorded eight *pterodromas* in small groups and singles that were almost certainly this species, north of the Cape Verde Islands at 20.5N 22.0W on 29 Nov. They had dark underwings, white underparts, dark grey wings, grey back, crown and tail and a dark eye patch.

SHEARWATERS ***Procellariinae***

Cory's Shearwater ***Calonectris diomedea***. During his return North Atlantic voyage DKB saw the first one at 52.6N 34.2W on 15 Aug and five at 51.6N 37.7W later the same day. Maximum daily counts included 10 in 1.2h at 49.7N 44.1W on 16th, one at 44.5N 61.1W on 18th, 61 in 2.7h at 39.4N 72.0W approaching the US coast on 19th, 25 in 3.5h at 38.7N 73.2W on 26th, nine at 40.0N 66.0W on 27th, three at 42.6N 57.8W on 28th, 293 in 1.7h at 44.8N 37.9W about 300nm NW of the Azores on 30th, 141 in 2.3h at 46.3N 27.6W on 31 Aug, 114 in 3.2h at 47.4N 21.3W on 1 Sept, seven at 49.0N 11.1W on 2 Sept and the last five in the Western Approaches at 49.8N 9.0W the same day. In the tropical Atlantic TJ recorded three at 4.0N 48.5W on 20 Apr and SC had two heading south at 16.8N 27.4W on 3 Dec. TJ recorded three in the South Atlantic at 30.6S 1.2W on 18 Mar 05, one the next day at 31.6S 4.6E and in South African waters six at 32.6S 10.8E on 20 Mar 05 and 10 at 34.5S 18.4E the following day. He also recorded up to 16 at Mersa el Brega, Libya from 3-9 Mar.

Great Shearwater ***Puffinus gravis***. West bound in the North Atlantic DKB saw the first six at 52.6N 34.2W on 15 Aug and thereafter saw them continuously until the US east coast. Maximum counts included 44 in 3.4h at 52.0N 36.2W on 15 Aug, 146 in 3.5h at 49.1N 45.8W on 16th, 209 in 3.2h at on the Grand Banks at 45.9N 55.1W with a fishing vessel nearby on 17th, 91 in 1h near fishing vessels at 42.3N 65.3W on 18th, 69 in 1.3h at 40.1N 69.0W and the last nine at 39.4N 72.0W on 19th Aug. Returning later in the month he saw small numbers off the US coast but had larger numbers on the edge of the Grand Banks with 461 in 1.8h at 43.2N 49.3W and 427 in 2.4h at 43.2N 48.4W on 29 Aug. Maximum daily counts thereafter were seven at 44.4N 40.1W on 30 Aug, 31 in 2h at 46.3N 28.5W on 31 Aug, 21 in 1.8h at 48.0N 17.2W on 1 Sept , 31 in 3h at 49.0N 11.1W on 2 Sept with the last seven at 49.3N 9.0W later the same day. In the tropical Atlantic SC saw one at 16.8N 27.4W on 3 Dec and another the next day at 16.7N 30.5W.

Sooty Shearwater ***Puffinus griseus***. Seen in small numbers by DKB during his return North Atlantic voyage with singles at 52.0N 36.2W on 15 Aug, 50.0N 43.3W, 49.7N 44.1W, two at 49.1N 45.8W on 16 Aug, singles at 46.6N 52.3W on 17 Aug, 43.0N 64.0W, 42.3N 65.3W on 18 Aug, 44.8N 37.9W on 30 Aug and two at 52.1N 5.6W off Pembrokeshire on 8 Sept. In Brazilian waters TJ recorded six at Rio Grande anchorage (32S) on 25 Apr 04, two off Cape Frio (22.8S) on 11 Jun 04 and three at 31.2S 50.2W on 6 Aug'04. Recorded at 62.4S in Drake Passage on 10 Feb'05(PG)

Manx Shearwater ***Puffinus puffinus***. DKB saw 115 in 1.7h at 54.1N 4.9W in the Irish Sea on 12 Aug, 11 at 55.2N 13.4W and 5 at 55.0N 15.0W the next day, two at 54.0N 25.3W,

and two at 53.8N 26.8W on 14 Aug and then no more until he approached the US coast on 19 Aug where he saw one at 40.1N 69.0W, six at 39.9N 69.8W, six at 39.4N 72.0W. On the return voyage he recorded two at 38.7N 73.2W and one at 38.7N 71.7w on 26 Aug, four at 40.0N 66.0W and one at 41.1N 63.1W on 27 Aug, nine at 43.6N 45.4W on 29 Aug, one at 44.4N 40.1W, one at 44.5N 39.5W and two at 44.9N 36.9W on 30 Aug, one at 46.3N 28.5W and two at 46.3N 27.6W on 31 Aug, two at 48.0N 17.2W on 1 Sept and one at 49.0N 11.1W on 2 Sept.

Audubon's Shearwater ***Puffinus lherminieri***. DKB recorded four in Gulf Stream waters at 38.7N 71.7W on 26 Aug.

Sooty Shearwaters *(Puffinus griseus)*, Berkley Sound Falkland Islands, 3 Dec 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

STORM-PETRELS Hydrobatidae

Wilson's Storm-petrel ***Oceanites oceanicus*** SC had up to five following his ship north of the Cape Verde Islands at 20.5N 22.0W on 29 Nov. Off Brazil TJ saw one at 28.4S 47.8W on 5 Aug 04. Seen at 67.8S off Adelaide Island, Antarctic Peninsula on 13 Feb 05(PG) .

Black-bellied Storm-petrel ***Fregetta tropica*** Recorded at 62.4S in Drake Passage on 10 Feb 05(PG).

European Storm-petrel ***Hydrobates pelagicus***. Two at Las Palmas Roads on 21 Feb 05 (TJ).

Madeiran Storm-petrel. *Oceanodroma castro*. Two were recorded by SC in their Atlantic range at 16.7N 30.5W on 4 Dec.

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. DKB encountered remarkable numbers on 16 Aug in the western North Atlantic with a total count of 1147 between 50.0N 43.3W and 48.6N 47.3W. Most were in small flocks flying SW at about 25 knots. This area is about 350 nm east of the nearest breeding grounds in Newfoundland and about 600 nm south from southern Greenland where they may also breed. The next day he counted 306 between 46.6N 52.3W and 45.7N 56.6W as he approached the Canadian coast. On the 18th he saw 253 between 44.0N 62.0W and 42.3N 65.3W off Nova Scotia and on the 19th 91 between 40.1N 69.0W and 39.4N 72W off shore from Nantucket Island to Cape May. On the return voyage numbers seen were around 40% lower but included 191 in 2.5 hrs at 43N 54.3W on 28 Aug and 286 at 43.2N 49.3W on the Grand Banks, 264 at 43.2N 48.4W on 29 Aug. In the tropical Atlantic SC recorded one at 16.8N 27.4W on 3 Dec. TJ recorded two in the North Atlantic at 25.7N 50.2W on 30 Mar, three at 25.7N 62.7W on 1 Apr and one at 10.3N 58.3W on 16 May. He also recorded one from the North Pacific at 49.7N 162.1E on 16 Feb 07.

TROPICBIRDS *Phaethontidae*

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*. TJ saw one off Brazil at 23.8S 43.4W on 4 Mar 05, and further north, one at 7.6S 34.3W on 10 May.

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*. One record from the Caribbean at 15.1N 71.5W on 15 Apr (TJ).

PELICANS *Pelecanidae*

Eastern White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* TJ reported 41 at Pointe Noire, Congo Republic on 12 Apr 04.

GANNETS and BOOBIES *Sulidae*

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*. There were a number of UK and Irish coastal records from DKB west to 55.4N 10.3W near the shelf break where he saw 7 Ad, 15 sub-Ad and 2 imm on 13 Aug. Later he also saw a few off Newfoundland then a sub-Ad at 38.5N 74.7W off Delaware on 25 Aug. An interesting record from TJ who saw an adult after three days of NW gales at Mersa el Brega, Libya on 9 Feb. He saw another off Algeria at 36.8N 0.5E on 21 Feb 07 and in the Atlantic one at 33.5N 10.5W on 23 Feb.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*. One juvenile was described by SC from the tropical Atlantic at 14.6N 50.1W on 11 Dec. There were a number of records from Brazilian waters and the Caribbean by TJ with 12 at 18.3S 37.2W on 2 May 04, 12 off Cape Frio (22.8S) on 11 Jun 04 and five imm and nine Ad at 5.0S 35.0W off NE Brazil on 31 Jul 04. Remarkably three of the immatures had metal rings on their right legs. He also saw 10 at 23.8S 43.4W on 4 Mar 05, up to 12 at Sepetiba Roads (23S) on 11 Mar 05 and one imm well south at 26.7S 24.4W on 14 Mar 05.He later saw 15 at 5.1S 35.0W on 23 Apr, 10 at 22.7S 41.2W on 7 May, 10 at

18.5S 37.6W on 8 May and three at 13.2S 35.9W on 9 May 06. In the Caribbean he saw one at 15.1N 71.5W on 15 Apr, two at 13.0N 66.2W on 16 Apr and two at 7.3N 53.1W on 15 May 06. In the Indian Ocean he saw an immature at 14.9S 97.3E SE of the Cocos Islands on 7 Apr 05.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*. In the Caribbean TJ saw singles at 23.3N 86.2W on 12 Apr and at 19.6N 83.6W the next day . Heading for Brazil he saw another at 5.1S 35.0W on 23 Apr, six at 22.7S 41.2W on 7 May and two at 13.2S 35.9W on 9 May.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*. A report of one from the northern limit of the Pacific range at 29.3N 172.5E on 22 Feb 07(TJ).

CORMORANTS and SHAGS *Phalacrocoracidae*

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. TJ saw 60+ at Onahma, Japan on 22 Feb 07.

Imperial Shag *Leucocarbo atriceps*. Recorded by PG on ice floes and on water at 67.8S off Adelaide Island, Antarctic Peninsula, 13 Feb 05.

FRIGATEBIRDS *Fregatidae*

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*. Three were seen off the port and 10 in Portsmouth Harbour, Dominica on 16/17 Dec (SC). In Brazilian waters TJ saw 40 at 22.7S 41.2W on 7 May and one at 2.0S 39.5W and to the north, one at 10.3N 58.3W on 16 May.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*. TJ reported 30 in Sunda Strait (6.3S 105.5E) on 10 Apr 05.

PHALAROPES *Phalaropodidae*

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*. DKB reported 74 in groups on the Grand Banks at 45.9N 55.1W on 17 Aug, one at 44.0N 62.1W the next day and six Grey/Red-necked at 39.9N 69.8W the next day, four at 43.4N 46.4W on 29 Aug.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*. DKB reported four Red-necked/Grey near the east coast of Canada at 42.8N 56.8W and four RN/G at 43.0N 54.3W on 28 Aug. Both species breed in the Canadian Arctic and pass through the area.

SKUAS and JAEGERS *Stercorariini*

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*. In the western North Atlantic DKB recorded six at 50.0.N 43.3W, one at 49.7N 44.1W and five in 3.5h at 49.1N 45.8W all on 16 Aug. During the return voyage he reported occasional single birds across the Atlantic and saw 13 in 3.5h passing through Straits of Dover 50.9N 1.2E on 3 Sept. TJ reported one at 10S 35.0W on 24 Apr and another at 1.5N 43.9W on 13 May which may have been this species or a southern migrant.

Southern Skua *Catharacta antarctica* TJ reported one at 31.2S 50.2W off Brazil on 6 Aug 04.

Pomarine Skua ***Stercorarius pomarinus***. DKB had several records from the North Atlantic including four at 49.1N 45.8W on 16 Aug and one at 38.8N 70.9W on 26 Aug.
TJ saw two in the Gulf of Guinea at 4.5N 2.4W on 27 Mar 04, one in the tropical Atlantic at 4.0N 48.5W on 20 Apr and another in Karimata Strait Borneo, 3.5S 109.6E on 11 Mar 05.

Arctic Skua ***Stercorarius parasiticus***. Also recorded by DKB but in greater numbers with five at 54.0N 25.3W on 14 Aug, seven at 49.7N 44.1W and 22 at 49.1N 45.8W the next day, and six at 43.2N 48.4W on 29 Aug.

Long-tailed Skua ***Stercorarius longicaudus***. In the North Atlantic DKB saw a south-westerly passage of 31 Ad in 3.4h at 52.0N 36.3W on the 15 Aug and during the same period another 70 skua sp. that were likely this species. Normal autumn migration for this species starts in mid August. He saw another nine adults in 2h at 51.6N 37.7W later the same day. The next day he saw five at 50.0N 43.3W, one at 49.7N 44.1W and nine at 49.1N 45.8W.

GULLS ***Larinae***

Antarctic Skua *(Catharacta antarctica)* and Kelp Gulls *(Larus dominicanus)*, North Arm, Falkland Islands 18 Nov 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

Laughing Gull ***Larus atricilla***. DKB recorded 66 Ad/imm in 1h at 38.7N 75.0W off US east coast on 21 Aug.

Black-headed Gull ***Larus ridibundus***. TJ recorded 12 imm and 10 Ad at Onahama, east coast Japan on 22 Feb 07.

Little Gull ***Larus minutus***. DKB saw two Ad at 53.5N 3.4W approaching Liverpool on 8 Sept.

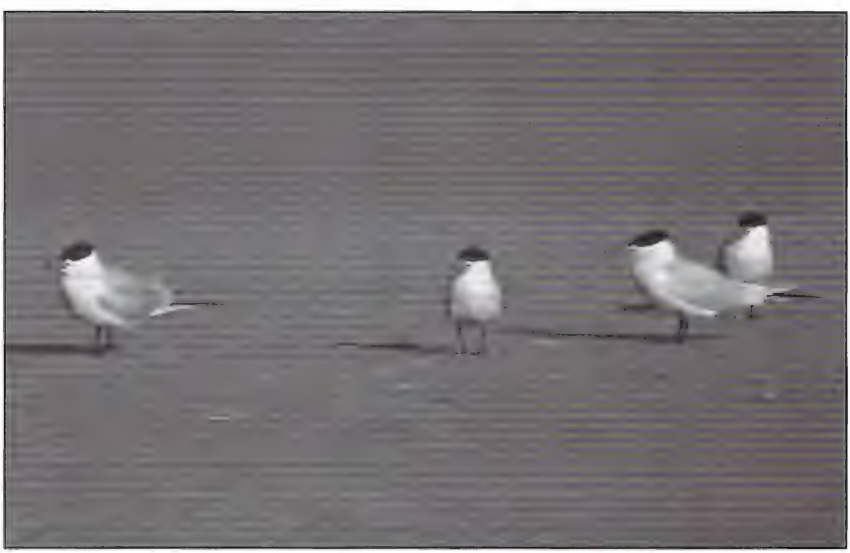
Black-legged Kittiwake ***Rissa tridactyla*** During his Aug North Atlantic crossing DKB recorded most in mid-Atlantic with a maximum count of 177 Ad in 3.4h at 52.0N 36.2W on 15th.

TERNS ***Sterninae***

Gull-billed Tern ***Gelochelidon nilotica***. One at Sepetiba Roads, Brazil (23S), 5/6 Mar 05 and seven at Tubarao Roads, Brazil (20.3S) on 27 Apr (TJ)

Caspian Tern ***Sterna caspia***. One at Portsmouth Hr, Dominica on 17 Dec, three seen approaching Pointe a Pilve, Guadaloupe on 19 Dec and two at Falmouth, Antigua on 21 Dec (SC).

Common Tern ***Sterna hirundo***. DKB counted 64 birds not distinguished from Arctic Tern at 52.1N 5.6W in the southern Irish Sea on 8 Sept. One was seen at Las Palmas Roads, 21 Feb 05 (TJ).



Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*, Murray Mouth, H.I. 20 July 2006. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

South American Tern *(Sterna hirundinacea)*, Berthas Beach, East Falkland, 13 Nov 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey

Arctic Tern ***Sterna paradisaea*** DKB encountered the southward migration in mid North Atlantic with 18 Ad at 52.0N 36.2W and 19 Ad at 51.6N 37.7W on 15 Aug and five Ad at 50.0N 43.8W, eight Ad at 49.7N 44.1W and six Ad at 49.1N 45.8W the next day.

Forster's Tern ***Sterna forsteri*** DKB reported two of this mainly inland and coastal tern at 38.7N 75.0W off the east coast of the USA.

Bridled Tern ***Sterna anaethetus.*** TJ reported one from 4.0N 48.5W off NE Brazil on 20 Apr and three in Old Bahama Channel on 20 May.

Sooty Tern ***Sterna fuscata*** TJ recorded 10 at 12.9N 63.2W off northern Venezuela on 17 May.

Little Tern ***Sterna albifrons.*** TJ saw two on 3 and 4 Mar at Mersa el Brega Roads, Libya.

Crested Tern ***Sterna bergii*** TJ saw one at 1.5N 106.5E, east of Singapore on 13 Apr 05.

Royal Tern ***Sterna maxima.*** TJ recorded 27 at Pto.Cabello, Venezuela on 13 May 05.

Sandwich Tern ***Sterna sandvicensis.***. DKB had an unusual report of five Ad in mid North Atlantic at 52.8N 33.8W on 15 Aug.

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Australia

Falklands Skua, Abbatoir Outlet, Falkland Islands, 29 Oct 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

A FALKLANDS TOUR

July 23 2006 saw me boarding a 747 on a muggy summers evening at RAF Brize Norton. Twenty hours later. I set foot down into a horizontal howling gale, with the temperature hovering just above zero. Welcome to Mount Pleasant.

Much has been written on the subject of these islands and the birds that inhabit them. After spending six months employed in Mount Pleasant, I would like to add a few notes of my own observations during an eventful six months

Firstly I was pleased with the timing of my tour. The six month period would initially see me birding away my spare time at the end of the austral winter and then progress through spring into the lengthening days of early summer.

Even as the plane taxied into the terminal area I saw the first birds of the tour. Fittingly it was the Upland Goose, *Chloephaga picta leucoptera*, a widespread resident of the islands, a few pairs were feeding at the runways edge and many more were in groups of up to twenty or so feeding on the short grass of the complex. Several of the similar, but smaller Ruddy Headed Goose, *Chloephaga rubidiceps* among them. This species has seen a severe restriction in its South American range leaving the thriving Falklands birds as an important population.

After settling in, the first week enabled me to catch up with a few of the more familiar airbase species. Dark-faced Ground Tyrants, *Muscisaxicola maclovianus maclovianus* frequented the short grass adjacent to the accommodation. Long Tailed Meadowlarks, *Sturnella loyca falklandica*, formed into large flocks and could easily be tempted in close with pieces of bread roll. The male is quite simply stunning. Kelp, *Larus dominicanus*, and Dolphin Gulls, *Leucophaeus scoresbii*, were always close to habitation especially when there was a chance of an easy meal from the kitchen waste bins. Turkey Vultures, *Cathartes aura jota*, were common around the base and each evening they came to roost on the roof of the sergeants mess. The various window sills and vents providing some degree of comfort in the lee of the often numbing wind. I had a count of 18 on one particular evening.

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*, in flight Sealion Island, 3 Sep 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

Another common bird with an interesting habit; at least a couple I regularly watched was the Falklands Thrush. *Turdus falcklandii falcklandii*. Several times I watched a pair around the Port at Mare Harbour. The perimeter of the port is encircled by rolls of barbed wire. These are set up so that two rolls lie side by side and a third is placed on top. I quite clearly saw the Thrushes use this habitat to their advantage. Because of the wind-chill factor I often sat at the end of a walk within the comfortable surroundings of my Land Rover to enjoy a well earned coffee and nibbles. As is my want, I used to share my rations with the thrushes and they became quite accustomed to hopping over to my vehicle for their treats. As soon as a Gull appeared on the scene the Thrushes would duly retreat with their prize into the relative safety of the wire. When the Gull threat had passed the thrushes would re-appear below the vehicle door. As you can imagine the Gulls would return and the same scenario would be played out again and again. I did hear from one local birder, Fred Clark; that several different species have taken to using the wire as nesting sites, including the impressive Red Backed Hawk, *Buteo Polyosoma*. All benefit from the obvious protection it offers, not unlike the Dunnock in your garden nesting in the Blackthorn.

The first few months passed quickly and I was soon joined on tour by CPO Mark 'Slasher' Cutts, another keen member of the society and long-time friend. Needless to say we intended to make the most of the four months we had together and we started of with a cracker by getting ourselves on the weekend helicopter trip to Sea Lion Island.

The island is a thirty minute trip by helicopter and one of its main benefits is the fact that it is entirely cat, rat and mouse free. The effect on the local birdlife is immense. Within seconds of the leaving the aircraft you are surrounded by Thrushes, Finches and the ever present Tussac-Bird, *Cinclodes antarcticus antarcticus*. This is the Falklands race of Blackish Cinclodes a much sought after South American speciality. The bird is one of the star attractions of vermin free islands. They are a constant presence until you re-board the helicopter for the mainland. The tide line is full of them and they have taken to the habit of feeding in the company of a far larger species, the Southern Elephant Seals that fill the beaches each spring. Wolfing down the sand hoppers that the large seals disturb. They are also quite happy to feed off the seals themselves, an act not always appreciated by the host.

The first stop off for the both of us was a walk to the HMS Sheffield Memorial, after paying our respects; we entered into the closely massed colonies of Rockhopper Penguins, *Eudyptes chrysocome chrysocome* and King Shags *Phalacrocorax atriceps albiventor*. These two species are quite happy in each others company and often nest in close proximity. The stench is quite appalling but the spectacle of the Penguins fighting their way up the cliffs is awe inspiring. From what we observed during this and subsequent visits the Shags had a good breeding season; on the contrary the Rockies did not fare so well. The decline of this species is already the subject of several studies around the islands.

Another of the islands specialities is the Striated Caracara, *Phalcoboenus australis*. There are attendant pairs near most penguin colonies. They are both an effective predator and scavenger. When we took a break halfway through the day we were joined by up to 15 immature Caracaras who were quite keen to share our lunch. All items have to watched closely as the Johnny Rooks as they are locally known, have been known to fly off into the distance with a camera in their talons.

Striated Caracara, *Phalcoboenus australis*, Sealion Island, 21 Oct 2006.
Photo: Steve Copsey.

I would say the one true speciality to stand, if not quite literally, head and shoulders above the rest is the Cobbs Wren, *Troglodytes cobbi*. This diminutive little bird is one of the two full species Falklands endemics. Its preferred habitat is boulder beaches backed by Tussac grass. The bird can be locally common in this habitat if the island is vermin free. Sure enough within a few minutes of sitting down on the beach we were joined by a confiding bird. It takes the niche of a mouse and rarely flies, preferring to hop and squeeze itself among the large over lapping beach boulders. If you sit still they will literally hop underneath you in their quest for invertebrates.

The second endemic is the Falklands Flightless Steamer Duck. *Tachyeres brachypterus*. This is a far easier species to connect with compared to the Wren and the sandy beaches we visited around Sea Lion were home to approximately a hundred birds with the majority in the surf feeding on the local crayfish and mussels.

Flightless Steamer Duck, *Tachyeres brachypterus* Female and young, North Arm, 18 Nov 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

We were now into early spring and the full breeding season would soon be upon us. After consultation with Robin Woods of Falklands Conservation, who helped and assisted us during several activities, we were keen to play an active part in the ongoing Breeding Bird Survey. We were allocated the task of monitoring the six ten kilometre grid squares in the vicinity of Mount Pleasant.

We attempted to work as much of the area as practical. It was soon evident from our previous ramblings that the bodies of water within our squares fell into two simple categories. Either they had plenty of birdlife on or around them or not. This appeared to be down to the presence of the native water milfoil, *Myriophllum elatinoides*, as it is correctly known is a good oxygenating plant and is beneficial to all manner of water borne life forms. Three ponds in our Squares had this plant in abundance. Sand and Champina pond were both situated within the Mount Pleasant complex and as such received many visits. The main species on these ponds were, as you'd expect Wildfowl and Grebes. The grebes are represented by two species, White Tufted, *Rollandia rolland rolland* and Silvery, *Podiceps occipitalis*. The former occupied most bodies of water in small numbers. The Silvery only seemed content within the Myriophllum ponds. However when it occurred it did so in good numbers and we had sightings of twenty or so birds on each of these ponds. Although not always easy to observe we counted at least eleven young Silvery Grebes on Sand Pond over the Christmas period. Another pond that ticked the

right boxes was to the rear of Berthas Beach. This was the largest *Myriophllum* pond in our survey area. Always productive, this body of water had a good range of species. The Black Necked Swan, *Cygnus melancoryphus*, was usually the first to stand out. Numbers varied each visit but we could generally rely upon seeing in the region of twenty birds. They are quite a timid bird and would often retreat to the middle of the pond when we approached. We did have breeding success on this pond with the Swans, Silver Teal, *Anas versicolor fretensis*, Speckled Teal, *Anas flavirostris* and Yellow Billed Pintail, *Anas georgica spinicauda*, all producing young. The South American race of Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus cassini* could also occasionally be seen patrolling the beach area.

Further down Berthas Beach is a small colony of Gentoo Penguins, *Pygoscelis papua papua*. These are probably the most watched penguins on East Falkland. Steady trickles of service personnel make the four mile round trip from Mare Harbour. We were no different and this colony received regular visits. It was nice to observe the full breeding cycle from Mating and egg laying to the young fledging and leaving the colony in late January. From what we observed at this and other colonies, the Gentoo's have had a very successful breeding season. At all colonies we visited in early summer the young birds had attained a good size and voraciously devoured all offerings from parents. A lot of waste food was spilt at the edge of colonies and this was greedily taken by Gulls and Falklands Skuas, *Catharacta antarctica*. The Skuas also take a proportion of young penguins; one such event was witnessed by Commander Chris Moorey and his family. A well grown youngster was taken and literally ripped apart by a couple of Skuas when it strayed a little too far from the safety of the colony.

Gentoo Penguins *Pygoscelis papua*, Berthas Beach, East Falkland, 24 Nov 2006.
Photo: Steve Copsey.

However, the Skuas did not always have it their own way. As I was watching another colony, one Gentoo adult grabbed a hovering Skua by the leg, as it eyed up a potential meal. It then maintained its grip as many other Gentoo adults launched a flurry of sharp beaks in the predators direction, the Skua did eventually free itself but did leave the colony pretty sharpish.

Bertha's Beach was a well walked route and other good birds seen regularly in this location included South American Tern, *Sterna hirundinacea* which bred in small numbers in the area and Pale-faced Sheathbill, *Chiois albus*. The Sheathbill is predominately a winter visitor but a few non-breeders also spend the austral summer scavenging around the shoreline.

The three commoner breeding waders all enjoyed successful seasons. The Magellanic Snipe, *Gallinago paraguaiae magellanica*, though not the easiest wader to observe was seen with young in many locations. The Rufous Chested Dotterel, *Charadrius modestus*, was easier to see but still a little wary, but again we saw many young birds among the Diddle Dee. In contrast the Two Banded Plover, *Charadrius falklandicus*, is an abundant easily seen breeding resident. We encountered this small wader in most habitats especially behind the sandy beaches, and the majority seen had one, two or occasionally three juveniles in tow. Many pairs were double brooding, as we saw a definite two stage cycle of very young birds. With peaks in November and again in early January.

We were very fortunate during our stay that we made contact with another local birder Alan Henry. Alan has lived in Port Stanley for the last eighteen years and we have to thank him for several highlights of our tour. He had already informed us that late October and November was a good time for rare vagrants and so an extra special effort was put in during this period.

Towards the end of October we were spending a weekend in Stanley with Robin Woods. In particular we were working an area of wetland near the airport. It had proved fruitful on several previous visits and today was no different. We were more than happy when an unidentified wader was heard calling in the area. We saw the dotterel sized bird land nearby and now joined by Alan; the bird was identified as a Pectoral Sandpiper, *Calidris melanotos*. This species occurs annually in ones and two's but this year was a good year and in the region of ten were seen over the season. The following weekend saw us near Port Louis at the west end of Berkley Sound. We had been tipped of by Alan that a Great Grebe, *Podiceps major*, had been seen the previous day. We arrived just before midday and had the Grebe showing well in our scopes within five minutes. Although at distance, the Great Grebe is an impressive looking bird. The same weekend we enjoyed good views of Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica* and the local race of Barn Owl, *Tyto alba tuidara*. The latter is a bird on the increase and due to its diet of small rodents; is usually present in and around settlement areas.

One blustery Sunday morning in November saw me and my family (they had flown down for a two week holiday!), Mark, Alan and his family doing a spot of off roading on a drive into the Fitzroy farm estate. After an hour or two of enjoyable driving, at least for me, we arrived at Whale Point. We were after two particular species this day and I'm glad to say we connected with both. The first was Coscoroba Swan, *Coscoroba coscoroba*; we saw eight adults on the pond behind the point. One pair had four cygnets in their wake; this was only the second breeding record for the islands so we were rather pleased with the sighting. Hudsonian

Godwit, *Limosa haemastica* was the other target species and seven birds showing on the rocky shoreline capped a memorable day.

Hudsonian Godwits *Limosa haemastica*, Whale Point, 26 Nov 2006.
Photo: Steve Copsey.

Two more waders made their way onto the tour list during November. Several Bairds Sandpipers, *Calidris bairdii*, were found near Berthas Beach. This is another rare annual visitor which was nice to catch up with. It is similar to the White Rumped Sandpiper, *Calidris fuscicollis*, a summer visitor which inhabits the beaches in their thousands, having bred earlier in the year in Arctic Canada. A yearly round trip of 18,000 miles, ensures that the White Rumped is one of the true long distant migrants.

The wader highlight of the trip was the discovery of three American Golden Plovers, *Pluvialis dominica*, at York Bay Pond, Port Stanley. Alan had briefly seen two unidentified waders in flight the previous week which he guessed might be this species, but they had not been seen again since. On Sunday the 12th Nov, myself and Mark spent the morning working the local hot spots around the capital. We arrived at York Bay Pond and set of on the normal circuitous route. Within a few minutes I had an American Golden Plover in my optics. I called Mark over and he confirmed the bird we then found another two birds. Previous records for the islands are in single figures, so we were pretty pleased with ourselves at re-discovering them.

In early December we managed yet again, with Alan's help, to get ourselves on the customs boat that works out of Stanley. The vessel was due to visit two Russian freighters anchored in Berkley Sound. The journey out to the sound takes the boat past Kidney Island, the nest

sight of up to 20,000 Sooty Shearwaters, *Puffinus griseus*. It was early evening and as we passed Kidney and we sailed through rafts of Shearwaters waiting to make their way ashore once darkness fell. We counted in the region of 4000 Sooty's over the next hour. An added bonus was the addition of a couple of Great Shearwaters, *Puffinus gravis*, which breed on the island in far smaller numbers. To complete a memorable evening, the only Macaroni Penguins, *Eudyptes chrysolophus* of the tour were also seen during the same trip. One pair nesting among the multitudes of Rockhoppers, the thick golden eye tufts glistening in the low evening sun.

The festive season soon came round; Christmas and Boxing Day were spent at our usual Bed and Breakfast in Stanley. After a Christmas lunch, consisting of a 24 hour ration pack, not all of it I hasten to add, we found ourselves on the end of Pembroke point for a few hours sea watching. We had already had some good birds from this location such as White Chinned Petrel, *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Southern Fulmar, *Fulmaris glacialoides* and numerous Southern Giant Petrels, *Macronectes giganteus*. Today being Christmas Day we thought we deserved a present for our efforts. One soon flew by in the form of a Wandering Albatross, *Diomedea exulans*. I have to admit at this point; in true naval style I was having a siesta in the warm afternoon sun. I was knocked by Mark who informed of the wanderer. I was soon on it and we both marvelled as it cruised into view with the ever present Black Browed Albatrosses, *Thalassarche melanophrys* in attendance. The latter is a large bird in its own right, but it was dwarfed by the Wanderer, which eventually dipped over the waves not to re-appear. It was a cracking highlight towards the end of my time to all but wrap things up.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Fred Clark, Alan Henry and Robin Woods for their help during the tour, and in particular for sharing the wealth of knowledge they all have regarding the flora and fauna of the Falkland Islands.

Steve Copsey

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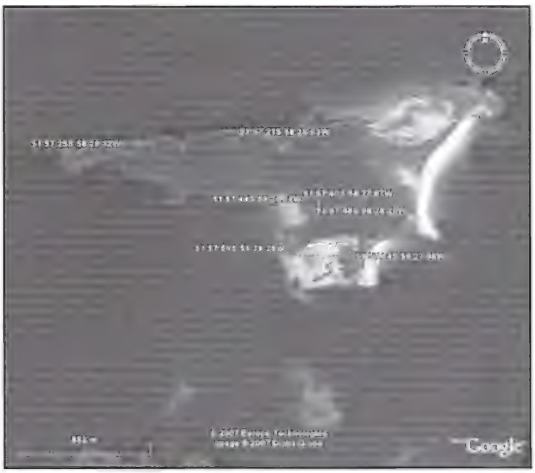
MIDDLE ISLAND NATURE RESERVE CHOISEUL SOUND

Report on a survey visit in December 2006 by representatives of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society and Falklands Conservation

Introduction

Middle Island covers about 150ha (375 acres) and was owned by the Falkland Islands Company and heavily grazed by sheep for many years until 1988. Flocks were shipped there to be fattened before being sent onward to Stanley for slaughter. Several islands near Lively Island were bought by Falklands Conservation in 1994 and Middle Island was surveyed briefly by Sally Poncet before purchase. The island extends east to west about 2.9km and is about 1km at its widest central point. It reaches no more than 15m in height towards the northeastern point and on the central ridge. There is open mature Tussac along the southern and eastern coasts but considerable erosion on the northern coasts above the 10m high cliffs. The habitat is varied with large sand beaches and some dunes on the eastern coast, lush grasslands and areas of semi-permanent water with some interesting plants.



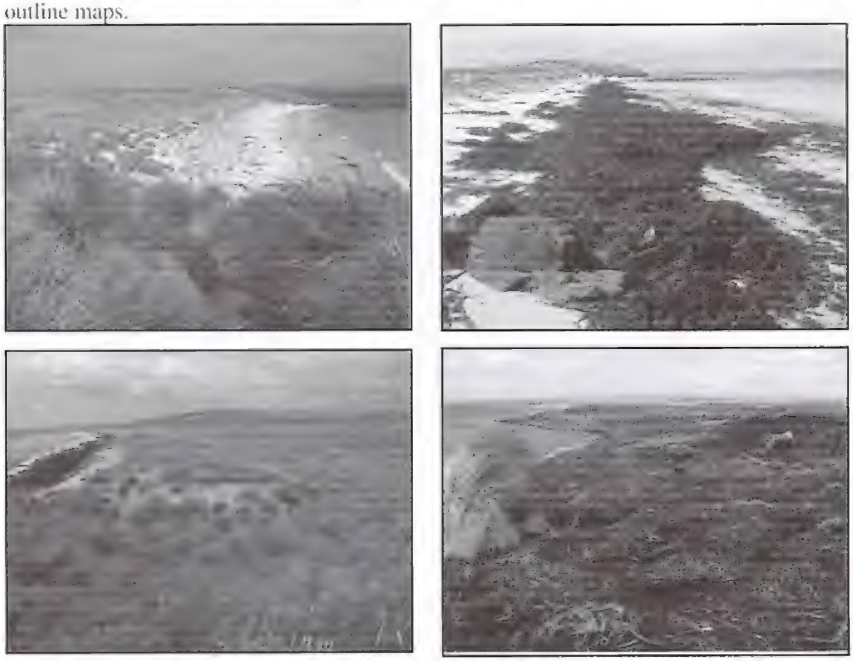
Middle Island: camp site on ridge at 51° 57.59'S 58° 28.28'W 51° 57.25'S 58° 29.12'W Rock Shag colony, northern coast: 51° 57.21'S 58° 28.63'W King Shag colony: 51° 57.44'S 58° 28.18'W central ponds (north): 51° 57.48'S 58° 28.20'W central ponds (south): 51° 57.40'S 58° 27.67'W pond bed inundated by Prickly Burr: 51° 57.64'S 58° 27.98'W pond eastsoutheast of camp.

In January 1997 a survey of the habitat, flowering plants and birds was made by Nick and Robin Woods. The records collected showed that it supported a fairly diverse flora, including several endemic species and that it was free of introduced predators (rats, mice or cats). Suggestions for management were made in the report to Falklands Conservation (R W and N C Woods 1997), which included setting up vegetation transects so that any changes over time without grazing pressure could be measured. Unfortunately none of the recommendations

has been implemented, which means that there is no hard information on vegetation changes, only impressionistic notes.

Since a further ten years free of grazing animals has elapsed, it was felt that a return visit to resurvey the environment was necessary. This project was therefore developed from October 2006 between the three participants, who are all members of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society. The visit was suggested to CPO Steve Copsey of the Joint Communications Unit and CPO Mark Cutts of the Supply Squadron at Mount Pleasant. They were very enthusiastic and saw their involvement as a way of showing other visiting RNBWS members that worthwhile birding projects could be carried out during their short time in the Falklands. Clearance for their participation was requested from and enthusiastically granted by Commander C G Moorey, Officer in Charge of the Royal Naval Detachment at Mount Pleasant. CPOs Copsey and Cutts negotiated for provisions and arranged for the Port Operations Troop, East Cove to take the party out on Friday 15 December and back on Monday 18 December on a Landing Craft.

Three tents were loaned by Falklands Conservation and most of the camping equipment, including stoves, fuel, utensils and rations were supplied from MOD at Mount Pleasant. Members supplied their own optical, photographic and record-making materials including outline maps.



Top Left: Landing Bay from campsite on day of arrival 617
Top Right: two days later, the same bay after northerly and westerly gales 821
Bottom Left: view east over northeastern point; sand with prolific growth of Bluegrass 636
Bottom Right: bad erosion of former Tussac fringe; view east from centre of northern coast 639

• to list the flowering plants present, by identifying all species found and making an assessment of their abundance
• to list all bird species found and to count populations where possible, including the numbers and sizes of broods
• to record noticeable changes in vegetation cover since January 1997
• to compare results from 1997 with this survey.

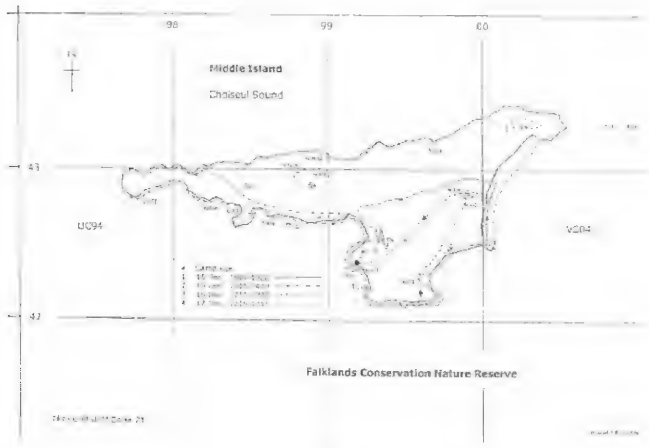
Weather 15-18 December 2006

15 Dec. Flat calm early morning but gradually strengthening to a moderate breeze around midday and a strong, gusty northerly by evening; multi-layered cloud increased from the northwest; much dust and grass fragments were blowing by mid-evening.

16 Dec. Layered cloud early, with strong, gusty northerly: intermittent rain from 0930-1030 but wind continuing very strong, estimated about 30 knots, gusting 50 knots by midday; wind continued very strong to gale through evening.

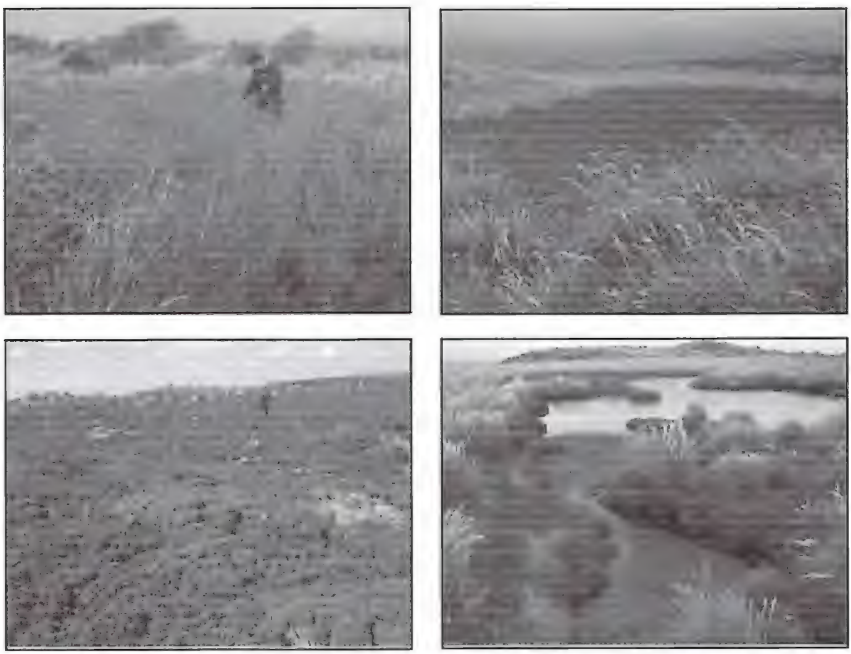
17 Dec. Cloudy with gusting westerly gale from first light and rain showers; heavy breakers on beach below camp and walking difficult on wet rocks by shore; tent pegs pulled by gale, needed replacement by timbers from beach; wind backed to southwesterly then eased to a fresh westerly from midday with partial cloud cover; by evening, wind had disappeared and cloud cleared while temperature dropped quickly.

18 Dec. Slight rain very early, clearing to high cloud with strong sun, no swell and almost calm when Landing Craft arrived by 1000.
Comment: conditions were not ideal for surveying at all times, but there was sufficient daylight and dry weather to make a reasonable assessment of most areas.



Extent of the survey

The whole coastline was walked at least once and about one-third was surveyed more than once. It was not possible to cover all inland ground in detail due to lack of time and some very inclement weather.



Top Left: Fuegian Foxtail: Mark Cutts within the stand, showing its abundance and height 624. Top Right: dried out pond northeast of camp, inundated by Prickly Burr 620. Bottom Left: view east over ridge with dense Diddle-dee and scattered Woolly Ragwort, remnant. Tussac on skyline 701. Bottom Right: peaty pond east of camp with bankside Pigvine and Bluegrass 618.

Plants

Sixty-two species of flowering plants were recorded. They are listed here with brief notes on their status. Eight species recorded for the first time on Middle Island are in bold.
The 12 introduced species found in 2006 are marked I and endemics are marked E.

Acaena lucida Native Yarrow - common
Acaena magellanica Prickly Burr - very common, colonising decomposed Tussac peat ('black ground'), silt in damp areas and sand
I *Aira praecox* Early Hair-grass - widespread on peat
Alopecurus magellanicus Fuegian Foxtail - dominant in damp ground but only at one locality near the eastern coast.

Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*. Location and date details are unknown.
Photo: Neil Cheshire.

Grey-headed Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma*, 44.9S 44.6E, 29 July 2005. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta* 45.9S 104.8E. 8 March 2007. Photo: Neil Cheshire.

Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus*. Location and date details are unknown. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*, Goolwa, S. Australia, 6 July 2006. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

Dolphin Gull (*Larus scoresbii*). Goose Green pier, Falkland Islands. 10 Sep 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

Brown-hooded Gull, (Larus maculipennis) Kelp Gull *(Larus dominicans)* and South American Terns *(Sterna hirundinacea)*, Berthas Beach, 8 Oct 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

Long Tailed Meadowlark *(Sturnella loyca)* Champina Pond, Falkland Islands, 20 Aug 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

I **Meadow Foxtail** *Alopecurus pratensis* - scarce, at one locality only.

Pimpernel *Anagallis alternifolia* - widespread, uncommon.

Wild Celery *Apium australe* - widespread and very common on sand.

Wiry Azorella *Azorella filamentosa* - uncommon at one location.

Christmas Bush *Baccharis magellanica* - widespread and fairly common.

I European Daisy *Bellis perennis* - widespread, numerous and co-dominant with *Leptinella scariosa* on several parts of the coastal slopes.

Tall Fern *Blechnum magellanicum* - uncommon, restricted to dense Diddle-dee on western slopes.

Small Fern *Blechnum penna-marina* - widespread and common on sand and peat.

Water starwort *Callitriche antarctica* - uncommon, in very damp places.

Arrow-leaved Marigold *Caltha sagittata* - uncommon but established in a few marshy areas.

Sword-grass *Carex trifida* - widespread but uncommon on small islands in ponds, at pond margins and on coastal slopes with Tussac.

I Field Mouse-ear *Cerastium arvense* - widespread with grasses, locally common.

Goosefoot *Chenopodium macrospermum* - uncommon, but locally numerous on sandy beaches.

Lesser Swine-cress *Coronopus didymus* - rare, few plants on peat.

Stonecrop *Crassula moschata* - widespread and common on coastal rocks.

Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* - uncommon, scattered through damp grassland.

Spike-rush ***Eleocharis melanostachys*** - rare, confined to one small pond margin.

Fuegian Couch *Elymus glaucescens* - widespread, common on sandy areas
Empetrum rubrum Diddle-dee - dominant in places, especially on central slopes of the western peninsula.

Land-Tussac *Festuca contracta* - widespread and common on inland sand.

Antarctic Bedstraw *Galium antarcticum* - uncommon among grasses and Small fern

Falkland Cudweed *Gamochaeta malvinensis* - rare, a few seen on sand.

Spiked Cudweed *Gamochaeta spiciformis* - rare, a few seen.

Mountainberry *Gaultheria pumila* - widespread and fairly common.

Pigvine *Gunnera magellanica* - widespread and numerous, especially in damp areas.

Cinnamon-grass *Hierochloe redolens* - locally common and dominant in patches.

I Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* - widespread and common on peaty grassland.

Nodding Club-rush *Isolepis cernua* - widespread but only in wetter places; much grazed by geese.

Native Rush *Juncus scheuchzerioides* - widespread and noted as colonising unstable black ground of decomposed Tussac peat.

Buttonweed *Leptinella scariosa* - locally very numerous on coastal slopes of sand or peat and co-dominant with European Daisy in places.

E **Vanilla Daisy *Leucheria suaveolens*** - rare; a few plants scattered through hummocky inland grasses.

Lilaeopsis *Lilaeopsis macloviana* - uncommon; only in wet mud.

Native Wood-rush *Luzula alopecurus* - widespread and common on sand and peat.

Almond-flower *Luzuriaga marginata* - uncommon; only on grassland with Diddle-dee.

Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum quitense* - uncommon; only in wet mud at an ephemeral pond.

Pale Maiden *Olsynium filifolium* - rare; few individual plants scattered through grassland.

Scurvygrass *Oxalis enneaphylla* - uncommon; scattered plants in Diddle-dee

and open grassland with Small Fern.

Rock-cress *Phlebolobium maclovianum* - very rare; only one plant found in mixed hummocky grassland near Tussac.

Thrift Plantain *Plantago barbata* - locally common, only on coastal slopes of extreme western point.

Bluegrass *Poa alopecurus* - widespread on sand dunes inland and associated with coastal Tussac.

I Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua* - widespread but uncommon.

Tussac *Poa flabellata* - widespread around coastal fringe, but only in good condition on some coastal cliffs and headlands; much evidence of former abundance and apparent destruction by fire.

Sea Knotgrass *Polygonum maritimum* - rare; only seen at one northern coastal locality on beach stones.

Berry-lobelia *Pratia repens* - rare; a few populations in damp inland grassland.

Dusty Miller *Primula magellanica* - rare, but locally numerous towards centre of island.

Short Rush *Rostkovia magellanica* - uncommon, only in muddy localities

Falkland Strawberry *Rubus geoides* - widespread but uncommon, with Diddle-dee and with grasses on sand.

I Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* - widespread, common among open Tussac and other grasses.

I Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens* - widespread but uncommon on damp slopes.

Buttercup-parsley *Schizeilema ranunculus* - rare; only found in one area of beachside mud.

Sea Cabbage *Senecio candidans* - widespread on sand beaches though only moderately numerous.

E Woolly Ragwort -*Senecio littoralis* uncommon though widespread among Diddle-dee.

E Smooth Ragwort *Senecio vaginatus* - widespread and common in a few places, mainly among Diddle-dee

I **Sticky Groundsel** *Senecio viscosus* - widespread and common, especially near penguin burrows

I Groundsel -*Senecio vulgaris* widespread but uncommon on peat

Stitchwort *Stellaria debilis* - uncommon or rare in open grassland

I Small Nettle *Urtica urens* - uncommon but locally numerous on sand

I Squirreltail Fescue *Vulpia bromoides* - widespread and fairly common

Comparison with 1997 Plant Survey

Due to further taxonomic work in South America and elsewhere, several species in this list have changed their status in the Falklands. Lesser Swine-cress *Coronopus didymus* is now considered to be a native, not introduced, while Lilaeopsis *Lilaeopsis macloviana* is not now considered a Falkland endemic as it has been found in southern South America. Similarly Falkland Cudweed *Gnaphalium affine* (reclassified as *Gamochaeta malvinensis*) has lost its Falkland endemic status. The scientific names of several of the species recorded have changed as noted in Broughton and McAdam (2005).

Year	Native species	Endemic species	Introduced species	Total species
1997	51	3	14	65
2006	51	3	11	62
Combined species recorded	59	4	16	75

Of the 65 species recorded in January 1997, only 52 were found in 2006. The 13 species not recognised were probably unrecorded for various reasons; three grasses were probably not yet flowering and were therefore overlooked; six species are very low growing and easily missed, especially where vigorous grasses have increased their cover; three introduced species are usually very local in distribution and may have become locally extinct. One species *Limosella australis* had possibly been extirpated from the only habitat where it was found in 1997. The first visit was about three weeks later in the summer season and the weather in spring and early summer had been noticeably dry, whereas there had been more rain up to December 2006. Some smaller herbaceous plants may not have been able to germinate or grow in spring 1996/97 but could have benefited from wetter conditions in late 2006. It was noticeable that there was more standing water in small pools than in January 1997.

The large pond hollow in which *Limosella australis*, *Spergularia marina* and *Lilaeopsis macloviana* were identified in 1997 was completely covered by dense *Acaena magellanica*

up to at least 20cm tall and this particular pond basin was almost dry in December 2006. No other plants were found within this basin.

However, an additional ten species were identified for the first time. These included one introduced grass and an introduced weed of disturbed ground, Sticky Groundsel *Senecio viscosus*, which is often abundant on peat around the entrances to Magellanic Penguin burrows but was only recognised as present and widespread in the Falklands from about the year 2000.

Only 16 of the 75 flowering plant species so far recorded on Middle Island are non-native, a lower proportion of introduced species (21%) than often found on heavily grazed islands. This again shows the value of Middle Island as a nature reserve and provides support for its status to be formalised as a National Nature Reserve.

Top Left: Buttonweed and a little Sheep's Sorrel covering hard peat surface, south coast 604. Bottom Left: Decomposed Tussac peat on northern slope, hummock stabilised by Native Rush 640. Top Right: eroded peat by southern shore, some new Tussac and Wild Celery 599 Bottom Right: European Daisy, Prickly Burr and Swordgrass by southwestern shore 712.

Birds

The following 31 species were recorded in December 2006. Of these, 22 species were definitely breeding and four were probably breeding, making a possible total of 26 breeding species. Five species were recorded either in passage offshore or scavenging at the King Shag colony.

Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua papua* - two on eastern sand beach with Magellanic Penguins.

Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus* - widespread burrows in sand and peat, perhaps 500-600 pairs.

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys* - passing far offshore in very small numbers.

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* - passing offshore in small numbers.

Rock Shag *Phalacrocorax magellanicus* - one colony on southeast-facing cliffs and at least three groups of 20+ on northwest-facing cliffs, total possibly 150 nests.

King Shag *Phalacrocorax atriceps albiventer* - one large colony, up to 600 nests, on north-facing cliffs.

Falkland Skua *Catharacta antarctica* - small colony on western ridge and another towards the eastern point; total up to 20 pairs; 9 nests seen with 2 eggs each.

Dolphin Gull *Leucophaeus scoresbii* - up to 20 individuals around King Shag colony

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* - about 25 individuals on coasts.

Yellow-billed Sheathbill *Chionis alba*- 24 birds in attendance at the King Shag colony.

South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea* - only one pair found, with a nest and one egg.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax falklandicus* - 10+ on coasts, including immatures, but no definite evidence of breeding.

Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta leucoptera* - 11 pairs recorded with a total of 46 goslings, in broods ranging from 1 to 9, average 4 goslings.

Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida malvinarum* - 20 pairs recorded with a total of 73 goslings, average 3.6, maximum 8 goslings per pair; one nest found with the female sitting on eggs and another containing goslings just hatched.

Flightless Steamer Duck *Tachyeres brachypterus* - 18 pairs counted with a total of 64 ducklings, average 3.5 per pair, maximum 9 ducklings.

Crested Duck *Lophonetta specularioides* - total 13 pairs spread around the coast, of which 7 pairs had between 2 and 5 ducklings, average 3; more than one group of 3 adults was seen with ducklings, a common arrangement in this species that is not yet understood.

Speckled Teal *Anas flavirostris* - one pair on a small shallow, peaty pond with 3 ducklings

Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix* - a single adult, apparently waiting off while its mate sat on a nest, but no nest could be found in the thick grasses.

Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus* - 18 pairs were recorded, with 6 immatures, 2 large chicks and 3 nests with 1 or 2 eggs.

Blackish Oystercatcher Haematopus ater - total of 6 pairs, with only 2 chicks and a nest with 1 egg.

Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus* - a single female with one very small chick on the northern slopes of sand with grasses.

Magellanic Snipe *Gallinago paraguaiae magellanica* - at least 20 individuals were flushed and 1 large chick seen.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura jota* - up to 10 adults seen overhead.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus sanfordi* - a single adult flushed from long grasses towards the northeastern point on 16 Dec.; the following evening one seen hunting in same area and also overhead at our camp.

Tussacbird *Cinclodes antarcticus antarcticus* - possibly up to 120 pairs, particularly numerous along the southern coastline; nestlings were being fed in some nest holes.

Dark-faced Ground-tyrant *Muscisaxicola maclovianus maclovianus* - about 10 pairs recorded; one nest found with 3 nestlings in a crack of a low cliff; mating was also observed.

Falkland Grass Wren *Cistothorus platensis falklandicus* - at least 6 singing males recorded; adult seen carrying food for nestlings.

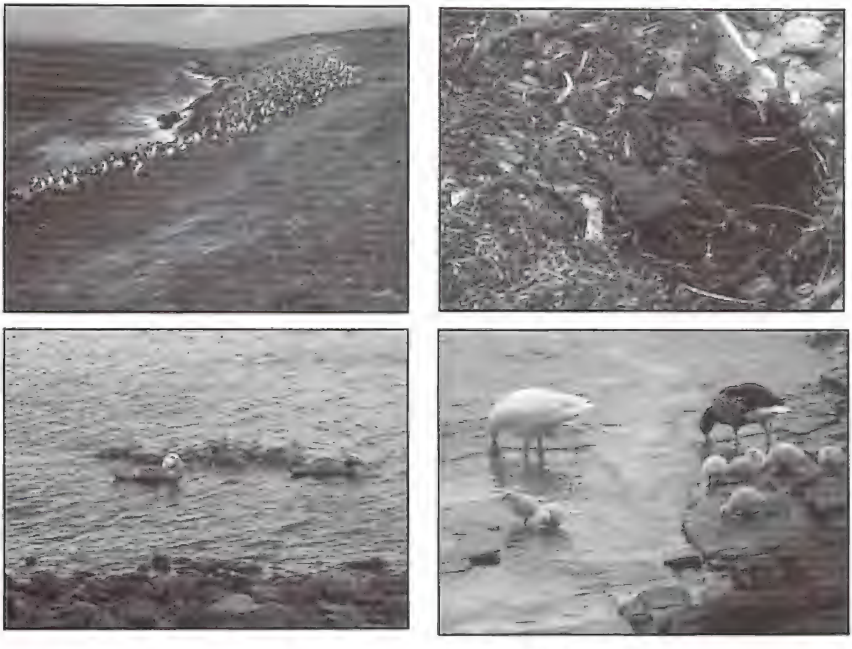
Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi* - up to 5 noted, including one juvenile; seemed to be more numerous along the southern coastline of the western promontory.

Falkland Thrush *Turdus falcklandii falcklandii* - total 15-25 recorded, including 2 juveniles.

Black-throated Finch *Melanodera melanodera melanodera* - up to 20 males singing, across island; some juveniles seen.

Long-tailed Meadowlark *Sturnella loyca falklandica* - 15-20 seen in open grassland, including 2 juveniles and some small family groups.

Black-chinned Siskin *Carduelis barbata* - 15-20 counted on seeding grasses, including 4 groups with juveniles.



Top Left: King Shag colony on eroded northern slopes 644
Bottom Left: Falkland Steamer Duck pair with 9 ducklings off southwestern coast 607
Top Right: Tussacbird hunting invertebrates on massive accumulation of dead kelp 603
Bottom Right: Kelp Goose pair with 8 goslings near camp site 547

Comparison with 1997 Bird Survey

Year	Confirmed breeding	Probably breeding	Possible breeding species	Non-breeding species	Total species recorded
January 1997	21	8	29	6	35
December 2006	22	4	26	5	31
Combined species recorded	22	9	31	7	38

Seven of the species found in January 1997 were not recorded in December 2006 (Common Diving Petrel, Ruddy-headed Goose, Variable Hawk, Southern Caracara, Peregrine Falcon, Brown-hooded Gull and Falkland Pipit). Of these, only the Ruddy-headed Goose and Falkland Pipit were confirmed or probable breeders in 1997. Three species were recorded in December 2006 that had not been seen in 1997. The two Gentoo Penguins were apparently only resting with Magellanic Penguins on a beach but the Speckled Teal was definitely breeding and the Chiloe Wigeon was probably breeding at one of the very small ponds set amongst lush grassland and Arrow-leaved Marigold with Spike-rush. A total of 38 species has now been recorded on or close to the island, of which it is likely that 31 species breed at least in some years if not annually.

Discussion

The eastern part of the island appeared to carry more dense grassland than in 1997. The Diddle-dee is dense and springy, the Prickly Burr is tall, with old crunchy stems below and the Bluegrass *Poa alopecurus* is in hefty tussocks covering large areas. Towards the northeastern point, this native grass dominated a wide strip of about 550m on pure sand and apparently provided a good habitat for a colony of breeding skuas.

The northern coastal strip of at least 2km from the western point and extending inland for up to 100m is badly eroded, showing mostly 'black ground' with patches of orange ash, where Tussac has been burnt out. Further inland as the ground rises slightly, Diddle-dee becomes dominant, with scattered yellow-flowered plants of the two endemic ragworts, Smooth Senecio vaginatus and Woolly *S. littoralis*.

There was more standing water in shallow peaty ponds than in January 1997, apart from the former largest pond at 51° 57.40'S 58° 27.67'W, which had almost dried out, probably because *Acaena magellanica* had dominated the area. Two more ponds were discovered about 400m east of our camp at 51° 57.64'S 58° 27.98'W. These supported the only population of Eleocharis melanostachys Spike-rush found, the breeding Speckled Teal and probably breeding Chiloe Wigeon.

The growth of Buttonweed *Leptinella scariosa* on coastal slopes of the western promontory and the apparent spread of Native Rush *Juncus scheuchzerioides* and Prickly Burr *Acaena magellanica* in mobile black decomposed Tussac peat, particularly along the ridge behind the northern coastline, suggests that these three species could be used as natural stabilising plants for other denuded sites that are prone to severe wind erosion. The spread of Fuegian Foxtail *Alopecurus magellanicus* was very marked in the eastern central part, from a few plants in 1997 to plants up to 1.5m tall dominating an area about 25m x 10m. Adjacent to this stand was a larger area dominated by Cinnamon Grass *Hierochloe redolens*. Amongst these grasses and the adjacent isolated large Tussac plants, the ground was extremely uneven and very difficult to walk through, because between tussocks of grass and small fern there were dips and holes that were hidden until one was almost on top of them. In the western promontory, the Diddle-dee completely covered large areas of the slopes and ridge and again, this was difficult ground through which to walk because one had to step on top of the plants, not between them.

There were some newly germinated Tussac plants but large areas of denuded peat remained, particularly along the northern coast. The evidence of former destruction of Tussac by fire was much greater than had been noticed in 1997. Large circles of orange ash amongst the black decomposed peat were apparently the remnant burned out bases of Tussac plants. There were also many irregular pieces of contorted clinker, some with glassy patches, which would appear to have been formed in high temperature fires, many years ago.

Conclusions

The visit was brief but successful, though somewhat hampered by very strong winds and the inevitable blowing black dust on an island that has suffered severe vegetation loss and soil erosion over many years. Nevertheless, the majority of the plants and birds found in 1997 were rediscovered and an additional ten plant species were found. Of the birds, several unrecorded in 2006 were only visiting species in 1997 and another two waterfowl, both probably breeding, were seen for the first time.

These two visits have shown that several plant species are capable of stabilising eroded or bare ground; the Native Rush is successful on mobile black peat dust while Bluegrass and Prickly Burr colonise open sand. Buttonweed and Thrift Plantain together seem capable of providing low and tough vegetation cover to coastal peat slopes which formerly supported Tussac.

Middle Island is a valuable Nature Reserve for Falklands Conservation and we now have more records that show the gradual recovery of an overgrazed and severely eroded island following the removal of sheep. Further survey visits should be made at least every five years, if not more frequently.

The possible presence of breeding Diving Petrels was not investigated in 2006 due to lack of time and the weather. The low cliffs with Tussac along the most southerly shoreline need further examination.

Acknowledgements

To Port Operations, East Cove and the crew of the LCVP; to Helen Otley and Anna Shepherd for transport between Stanley and East Cove; to Falklands Conservation for approval of our planned visit and loaning tents; to Commander C. Moorey of the Supply Squadron for authorising the involvement of the naval personnel in this survey and to two other senior officers at Mount Pleasant, Lt Commander Paul Nash and Major Chris McGinley.

Robin W Woods
May 2007

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Tussacbird *(Cinclodes antarcticus)* with Southern Elephant Seal *(Mirounga leonina)*, Sealion Island, Falkland Islands, 3 Sep 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*). Surf Bay, Falkland Islands, 25 Nov 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

NORTHERN GIANT PETREL *(MACRONECTES HALLI)* IN EAST FALKLAND

Mark Cutts

Giant Petrels are a relatively common sight around both the coastline and marine ponds of the Falkland Islands. There are two species of Giant Petrel within the Genus *Macronectes*: the Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* and the Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*. Both species are similar in size to a small albatross species and both are recorded on or around the Falkland Islands.

Northern Giant Petrel *(Macronectes halli)* (bottom) and Southern Giant Petrel *(Macronectes giganteus)*, Abbatoir Outlet, Falkland Islands, 29 Oct 2006.
Photo: Steve Copsey.

It is not until seen close up, either at rest on the sea or at a carcass, that the characteristics of both species can be studied. At first observation, they are very similar, but there are some key features which separate them in the field. Variation in bill tip colour in adults is the most commonly used; the upper bill tip colour in Southern Giant Petrel is green whilst its Northern counterpart is a dull red. This field characteristic is also present on some juveniles and immature birds, but is not as reliable as that of the adults.

As previously mentioned, both species have been recorded on the Falkland Islands, but the occurrence of Southern Giant Petrel is much more regular. The first documented record of Northern Giant Petrel was not until November 1980 at Meangeary Point, Port William. Observations taken by the Falklands Conservation Seabirds at Sea Team between 1998 and 2000 showed the ration was about 5:1 in favour of Southern Giant Petrel. Equally, the 2004/5 breeding census showed just under 20,000 pairs of Southern nesting at 47 sites throughout the islands, whereas there was just a single, unconfirmed, record of Northern from Beauchene Island. However, Northern Giant Petrel is known to breed in some numbers on South Georgia.

Northern Giant Petrel *(Macronectes halli)*, Abbatoir Outlet, Falkland Islands, 29 Oct 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

It can be seen that sightings of Northern Giant Petrel around the islands was irregular, but the discovery of a key site on East Falkland has changed this. The abattoir outfall for Sand Bay Abattoir located to the west of Port Stanley heading towards Darwin and Goose Green, is located at the end of Port Howard inlet. EU accredited in 2002, it processes between 12 and 18 thousand sheep annually that are then exported worldwide. Parts of the animal unable to be used are disposed of at this outlet by tipping over a cliff.

The presence of large amounts of animal waste attracts significant numbers of scavengers with Gulls, Skuas and Vultures all present. However, these species are regularly outnumbered by Giant Petrels with as many as 500 individuals present at any one time. This gathering of a species group that is usually solitary, or, at best, in small parties, allows the chance to distinguish between the two forms at close ranges as they forage on carcasses along the cliff line.

During my time on the islands, I made a number of visits to this site and was rewarded with counts of up to 12 Northern Giant Petrel; at each visit there was at least one Northern. The high count represents approximately 2% of the Giant petrels present and constitutes a lower ratio of Southern to Northern than that recorded by the Seabirds at Sea Team. However, the regular sightings at this newly discovered site merits further research into the abundance of Northern Giant Petrel around the islands, and, currently, provides the best opportunity of seeing this previously irregular Falklands species.

Acknowledgements

To all local residents who willingly granted access to their land. We were invariably welcomed and made to feel part of the community and their support has made the furtherance of seabird research around the islands easier.

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BIRDS OF THE CHACAO CHANNEL

Captain M K Barritt RN (Retd)

The Chacao Channel (41° 47' S 73° 33' W) separates the island of Chiloe (The Island of Seagulls) from the mainland of Chile. Locals proudly claim the island's main thoroughfare as the southernmost leg of the Pan-American Highway within their country. No less than 7 ferries, operated by two efficient rival companies, serve the crossing, and demand for a bridge was only quelled by a complex environmental study. This confirmed the challenges which had long been known to seafarers.

Charles Darwin commented on the thunderous surf on the coasts at the western entrance to the channel, where the seascape is punctuated by white flashes like falling shot as the Pacific swell breaks on island cliffs and submerged rocks. He also noted that the Spanish government had closed the old port of Chacao and moved the inhabitants to San Carlos (Ancud) because of the dangerous currents in the rock-strewn channel which caused frequent shipwrecks. In the following century, R. C. Murphy also remarked on the 'terrific rapids' which 'rush back and forth through the Chacao Narrows'. The South America Pilot, Volume 3 (NP 7), confirms that the tidal stream can be dangerous, with virtually no period of slack water. At Springs the channel gets very choppy and there are whirlpools and eddies.

Magellanic Penguins *(Spheniscus magellanicus)*, Middle Island, Falkland Islands. 16 Dec 2006. *Photo:* Steve Copsey.

At 1000 on 16 November 2006, four days before Springs, the west-going stream was only just starting to run. Nonetheless, the centre of the channel was swirling with the phenomena which, according to Murphy, the locals called 'rayas'. It was here in mid-channel that marine life was most abundant, including bull seals which passed determinedly and defiantly ahead of the ferry. Magellanic Penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* surfaced at close quarters, panting with their bills open. One Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata* was sighted heading to seawards. On the return crossing at c1745, the east-going stream was well established, but the "rayas" were not apparent. Magellanic Penguins were present, but no mammals were sighted until closer to the N shore, when a small pod of dolphin was spotted closer to the mainland.

In general, the avifauna closer inshore was typical of the region, with Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus*, Brown-hooded Gulls *Larus maculipennis* and South American Terns *Sterna hirundinacea*. The dominant presence, however, is the Imperial Shag *Phalacrocorax atriceps*. On the Chiloe shore they were numerous, along with groups of Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melancoryphus* in the shallows. On the mainland side they were again abundant, and were sometimes in company with Peruvian Pelicans *Pelecanus thagus*. During the return passage in the afternoon a line of 9 Imperial Shag was observed flying to seawards with 9 Peruvian Pelicans following in line astern.

Back in mid-channel the most rewarding spectacle was the passage of numerous shearwaters, with larger numbers during the morning. These were mixed groups of Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus* and Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* in which the latter species predominated. In the afternoon a small group of Sooty Shearwater was put up from the surface immediately ahead of the ferry, permitting excellent close views. Only one other *Procellariinae* species was seen in the channel. This was a single bird close inshore on the north side which had the *zizz* of a White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*.

An internet research reveals that the Chacao crossing, and its bird-watching potential, feature on many tour options. However, there are few records of observations, and the ferry voyage would seem to offer an under-exploited opportunity to build up a picture of the avifauna at a key point where the Pacific Ocean meets the channel system of S Chile.

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Wandering Albatross *(Diomedea exulans).* Location and date details are unknown. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

MIGRATION OF THE LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *(LARUS FUSCUS)* ALONG THE ROMANIAN LITTORAL OF THE BLACK SEA

by Gabriel Banica

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) is a Palaearctic species (Voous 1960). It is a migratory species found in some abundance in northern and western Europe ranging from Ireland to the Iberian peninsula. The breeding population is estimated between 210,000 and 250,000 pairs, with the majority, 86,000, being in Great Britain (Hagemeijer 1997).

On completion of the breeding season, the birds move south to their wintering areas. The population divides and elements winter in western Africa south to the Gulf of Guinea, some in the Red Sea and the remainder in the North Sea or Bay of Biscay. Recent surveys have shown small populations in the Mediterranean along the Italian littoral where 703 birds were counted in January 2000 (Bacetti et al 2002).

In Romania, the Lesser Black-backed Gull is a rare species, only normally being recorded on its passage along the marine littoral and around the Danube delta. Reports from inland are very unusual (Munteanu 1982).

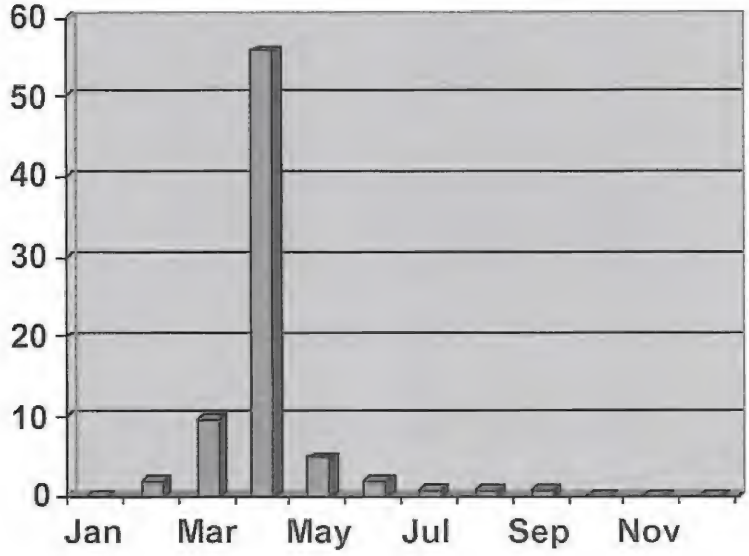

Figure 1: Distribution of LBB Gull on passage off Constanta, Romania 1990 -2005.

I have carried out surveys for Lesser Black-backed Gulls around the Romanian littoral of the Black Sea between 1990 and 2005. During those 16 years, I counted 78 occurrences. These records were of 2 occurrences in February, 10 in March, 56 in April, 5 in May, 2 in June, 1 in each of July, August and September (see Figure 1). The species was absent in other months. Of the 78 records 6 were on the littoral lakes adjacent to the sea and the rest were at sea, near the coast or in Constanta trade harbour.

The records were heavily weighted to individuals or small groups, but there were groups of 35 (12/4/92), 30 on 4 occasions (12/4/94, 13/4/94, 17/4/96 and 11/4/03) all near to Constanta. All observations were made in fair weather and all records were of the sub species *Larus fuscus fuscus* – the back and the upperside of the wings were black or almost black, without contrast with the wingtips and with the head and neck black strips (Svennsson et al 2000).

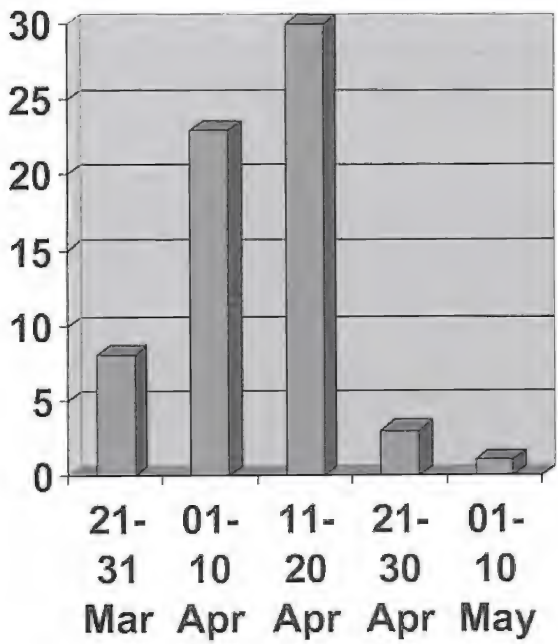

Figure 2: Distribution of LBB Gull by period in Spring.

The following conclusions are made:

- Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*migrates through the Romanian littoral of the Black Sea each spring on its way to the breeding sites in northern Europe.
- Peak time for passage is April with 72% of the records being in that month.
- The most numerous occurrences were in the middle third of April (11th to 20th) with 38% of all records within that window.
- It would appear the species does not migrate back in autumn though the Romanian littoral; they must take a different route to their wintering grounds in Africa and the Middle East.
- The species would appear to prefer the coast and open sea with 92% of records from those habitats.
- It is considered that all records refer to the sub species *Larus fuscus fuscus*.

It is hoped that this data, gathered over a period of time, contributes to the wider knowledge of the distribution of this beautiful gull.

Gabriel Banica
Constanta
Romania

REVIEW:
ALBATROSSES, PETRELS AND SHEARWATERS OF THE WORLD

By Derek Onley and Paul Scofield, 2007.
Published by Christopher Helm, A&C Black Publishers Ltd London and Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, USA. £19.99/US$29.95. Softback.

This field guide covers 137 species of the avian order Procellariiformes and includes the albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters, diving petrels and storm petrels. The aim of the guide, by New Zealanders, Paul Scofield and Derek Onley, is to enable the identification of these birds in flight at sea. The book has a comprehensive introduction with notes on taxonomy, the general characteristics of the four families, advice on identification, plumage variation, phases and morphs, age related plumage, plumage wear, moult and conservation.

There are 45 plates with over 500 separate illustrations representing a massive effort by the artist Derek Onley. His illustrations are excellent, true to life and comprehensively cover adult, immature, juvenile, worn and bleached plumages, also colour phases. I particularly liked his eye for detail: for example, the partial white shafts to the outer primaries of White-chinned Petrel and the diagonal dark mark on the sides of the rump of the Grey Petrel. The caption notes alongside each plate in addition to the main text are very useful and also facilitate cross referencing. A couple of the plates showing mainly white birds have a slightly washed out appearance and I am not sure if in my Princeton edition this is an artefact of the printing or if a lightly coloured background instead of white would have been better. However this is a minor observation.

Each species is dealt with at length in the systematic text where there are notes on taxonomy, distribution, behaviour, 'jizz', size and weight, moult and wear, plumage and identification. There are useful summary tables for each group listing dimensions and weights. The authors point out "many texts in this book do not agree with the 'conventional wisdom' and contradict published identification texts that many birders accept as truth". They welcome a vigorous debate and they are likely to get it! The taxonomy adopted is courageous and the authors go to some length to explain their position. Much of the book follows Brooke (2004), and when considering the smaller shearwaters, the recommendations of Austin *et al.* (2004). Twenty-one species of albatross are recognised with Wandering Albatross split into Snowy Albatross *Diomedea exulans*, Tristan Albatross *Diomedea dabbenena* and New Zealand Albatross *Diomedea antipodensis* with sub-species *antipodensis* and *gibsoni*. The 'Wanderer' complex is dealt with in detail with eight typical plumages illustrated and described with a summary table showing those attained by the different species and sub-species. With the amount of overlap and current ID criteria, field identification of the four species in the complex is very problematic if not impossible. The English names are for the most part the most commonly used versions and follow no particular authority. I do think Tropical Shearwater for *Puffinus bailloni* is particularly lame and needs to be changed.

For every species there is a 64 x 46 mm distribution map that also shows the main breeding areas. For a change in a field guide, this is printed clearly enough and is large enough to peruse

in reasonable detail. Enough to discern on the Amsterdam Albatross map their breeding island has been relocated to Kerguelen! Distribution maps of this type are however a broad brush and a species can be common or rare within the indicated range, and as sometimes mentioned in the text vagrancy often occurs.

I enjoyed the text which is innovative, somewhat provocative at times and no doubt will rattle the bars of a few cages. The excellent illustrations are 'state of the art'. Anyone venturing to sea will find this book very useful to identify this complex group of birds. All 'seabirders', whether active or armchair will want a copy.

References:

Austin,J.J., Bretagnolle,V & Pasquet,E. 2004. *A global molecular phylogeny of the small Puffinus shearwaters and implications for systematics of the Little-Audubon's Shearwater complex.* Auk 121:847-864.

Brooke, M.de L. 2004. *Albatrosses and Petrels across the World.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Neil Cheshire

Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta* 45.9S 104.8E, 8 March 2007. *Photo:* Neil Cheshire.

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